

U N I O N *Anniversary* S E R I E S

The Septuagint
The Oldest Translation of the Bible

BY
DR. HARRY M. ORLINSKY

U N I O N O F A M E R I C A N H E B R E W C O N G R E G A T I O N S

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EDITED BY

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Educational Director

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THE SEPTUAGINT, THE OLDEST TRANSLATION
OF THE BIBLE

by
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I. EGYPT AND ITS JEWS DURING THE THIRD CENTURY B.C.E.

About 2200 years ago there were many Jews in Egypt and especially in its capital city, Alexandria. Some of them were the descendants of Jews who had fled from the Kingdom of Judah as a result of the great destruction wrought by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia in 587 B.C.E. Others traced their ancestry to Jews who emigrated from Judah to Egypt at a later date, during Persia's rule. Still others were Judean freemen, or their children, who were taken into Egyptian captivity by Ptolemy I Soter (323-285 B.C.E.) and liberated in the course of time.

This large and important Jewish community retained a deep interest in its parent body in Judea. It sent tithes and made pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem, and maintained and even strengthened the bonds of religion and culture between itself and the homeland.

However, conditions in Egypt under the Ptolemies were not the same as those in Judea during the Second Jewish Commonwealth. The tremendous military conquests achieved by the Greeks under Alexander the Great did not fail to bear political and cultural fruit even after their great leader died in 323 B.C.E. Western Asia (Babylonia, Asia Minor, and Syria) finally fell to General Seleucus, and Egypt was taken over by General Ptolemy. Judea became a pawn between the Seleucids in the north and the Ptolemies in the south, struggling hard to play off the one against the other and to maintain a measure of independence, as well as to try to

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increase it. Greek culture, too, invaded these non-Greek territories. The Hellenic language and civilization came to the direct attention of the peoples of Western Asia, Judea and Egypt, and began increasingly to affect them. The way of life known as Hellenism was on the march.

The Jews of Egypt knew Hebrew and Aramaic, the latter especially being widespread. Already in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. the Jewish garrison stationed at Elephantine, at the first Cataract of the Nile River, employed Aramaic. However, just as the Jews of Europe who came to this country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found, after a while, that they sometimes had to give up the linguistic vehicles of their culture (e.g., German, Yiddish, Hungarian) for the national language of America, English, so too did the Jews of Egypt come in time to realize that for certain aspects of their culture they had to give up Hebrew and Aramaic in favor of Greek. And just as the Jews of America during the past century found it necessary to render their Bible into English, so did their ancestors in Egypt during the third century B.C.E. find themselves compelled to translate their Bible, the Torah, into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint, and it is the first translation of the Bible ever made.

II. THE LETTER OF ARISTEAS

A. Contents of the "Letter"

Most of our information about the origin of the Septuagint comes from a little Greek work known as "The Letter of Aristeas." An Alexandrian who called himself Aristeas addressed a letter to his brother Philocrates, telling him how Demetrius, head of the famous library in Alexandria, persuaded Ptolemy II Philadelphus

(285-246 B.C.E.) to send a delegation to the High Priest Eleazar in Jerusalem, with the request that he appoint six Elders from each of the twelve tribes of Israel for the purpose of translating the Torah into Greek. The translation when completed was to be deposited in the library. Eleazar complied with the request. He appointed seventy-two Elders, who proceeded to Alexandria with "the parchments on which the Torah in Jewish characters was inscribed in gold." After a royal banquet which lasted seven days, the Elders departed for the island of Pharos to a building specially prepared for them. There, in seventy-two days, the Elders completed the Greek translation. Demetrius then "assembled the Jewish people on the spot where the translation had been made, and read it through to the whole assembly in the presence of the translators, who received another great ovation from the people." The work was then read to the king, who "made obeisance and ordered that great care should be taken of the Books."

B. Reliability of the "Letter"

It has been said of the "Letter" that it lacked all historical validity; that some Alexandrian Jew, wishing to glorify his people and the Torah in the eyes of his non-Jewish neighbors, assumed the Greek name Aristeas, made up the story, and "palmed" it off as true. The well-known German scholar of pre-World War I days Emil Schuerer, classified the "Letter," together with other works which came to be called Apocrypha, under the heading: "Jewish Propaganda under a Heathen Mask."

We now know better. It is now generally recognized that the "Letter" is far from being unhistorical; that while many of the details are fictitious, there is considerable truth which remains;

that many expressions and references in it could hardly have been known and employed in a much later age.²

III. THE NAME "SEPTUAGINT"

The term "Septuagint" (frequently abbreviated "LXX") which is applied to the Greek translation of the Bible, is but the Latin word septuaginta meaning "seventy." Aristeas tells us, as we mentioned above, the seventy-two Elders took part in the translation; consequently, the latter should have come to be called "The Translation of the Seventy-two." While it is no longer possible to determine with certainty the circumstances under which "Seventy-two" became "Seventy" (the Talmud speaks of the "Translation of the Seventy"), it would seem that the change took place in Judea because of some popular association with the "seventy elders" mentioned in Exodus 24:1,9 (where Moses publicly read and authorized the "Book of the Covenant"), or with the Sanhedrin of Seventy, or in Christian circles with the seventy apostles of Jesus (Luke 10:1).

IV. THE SEPTUAGINT AMONG JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

Here then was an authorized translation of the Hebrew Torah into Greek, the work of Jewish scholars. And within a century or two the rest of the Bible, the Prophets and the other Books which came to constitute the Writings, were likewise done into Greek. It was popular, and widely used in Jewish circles.

But numerous changes took place in Jewish life after 70 C.E. Rome crushed Jewish sovereignty and destroyed the Temple. Christian Jews, one of several Jewish sects towards the end of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, began to move more and more from things Jewish and in the direction of things Gentile, so that by the time

the Bar Kochba revolt was crushed in 135 C.E. the majority of Christians were not Jews in origin but Gentiles. The Jewish Greek Bible, the Septuagint, became for them not merely a translation of the Bible but a complete substitute for the Hebrew Bible; in fact, in the early church, the Septuagint was not infrequently considered even more inspired than the original Hebrew! In the Western (Roman Catholic) Church it was only after the fifth century C.E. that the Septuagint was replaced by Jerome's Latin translation the Vulgate. In the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) Church, the Septuagint is still the official Bible.

The Jews, on the other hand, began to shy away from the Septuagint, as from many other Jewish works in the Greek language (e.g., the writings of Philo, Josephus, the Apocryphal literature), especially after the Christians adopted the Septuagint as their own and here and there even changed an expression to conform to their own theological outlook. Furthermore, in keeping with the manner of interpreting Holy Scripture in the first and second centuries C.E., a new Greek translation of the Bible was made, by Aquila; it was still in use in the synagogue in the days of the Byzantine emperor, Justinian I (sixth century), and fell into disuse when Arabic came to replace Greek and Latin after the seventh century.

V. SOME EXTERNAL FEATURES OF THE SEPTUAGINT

A. Names of Biblical Books

Those who have read the Bible in the original Hebrew know that the names of the different Books are frequently derived from the first important word or words in the Book. Thus, B'reshis ("In the beginning"), Sh'mos ("Names"), Va-yikro ("And He called"),

The first of these is the fact that the law of the land is not a static thing, but a living thing, which grows and changes with the times. The second is the fact that the law of the land is not a thing, but a process, which is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the people who live under it. The third is the fact that the law of the land is not a thing, but a process, which is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the people who live under it.

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B-midbor ("In the wilderness"), and D'vorim ("Words") constitute the Hebrew names of the Five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch; Torah). In the Septuagint, however, the names describe the main contents of each Book, so that these Books are called respectively: Genesis ("Creation" of the world), Exodus (from Egypt), Leviticus (priestly matters), Numbers (the census taken of the Hebrews in the wilderness), and Deuteronomy (the second giving of the Torah; cf. 17:18). It is clear that the English titles of these Books derive from the Septuagint (by way of the Latin). However, the Septuagint usage is also Jewish, and we know that B'reshis was sometimes referred to as Sefer Y'tsiro "Book of Creation" (Genesis); and Va-yikro was called popularly Sefer Kohanim "Book of the Priests" (i.e., Leviticus); and D'vorim had another name, Sefer Mishneh Torah (i.e., Deuteronomy).

B. Order of the Books

The Torah came to be canonized, that is, designated as Sacred Scripture, by the time of Ezra in the fifth century B.C.E.; the Prophets (Hebrew: N'vi-im), sometime before 200 B.C.E. The third major division, the Writings or Hagiographa (Hebrew: K'suvim, however, did not become fixed until about 65 C.E., and this resulted in considerable fluidity in the order of the Books.

During the period preceding 65 C.E., when our Bible was known only as "the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the Books," the Jews who used the Septuagint began to put some of "the rest of the Books" among the Prophets. Thus, the Septuagint (followed by the Latin and English Bibles) listed Ruth after Judges, Lamentations after Jeremiah, Chronicles after Kings; and the like.

C. The Books Included in the Septuagint

Until the rabbis fixed the limits of the Hebrew Canon in the first century C.E., learned Jews could regard as sacred any Hebrew book which they believed was divinely inspired. Scores upon scores of works were written by Jews during the Second Jewish Commonwealth, and many others after the destruction of Judah in 70 C.E. Many of these books were included in the Septuagint. However, when the Hebrew Bible was fixed, and only twenty-four books finally included in the Canon, all the other works were set aside and designated as "Outside Books" (Hebrew: S'forim Chitsonim).

The Christians, however, naturally did not heed the rabbinic edict all the way. The Septuagint was their Bible, and it contained many books never included in the Hebrew Canon and numerous additions to such canonical books as Daniel (Susannah, Bel and the Dragon) and Esther. After considerable debate at various Synods (Church Conferences) the Catholic Church decided that the Christian Canon would include all of the Hebrew Canon (which they came to call the "Old Testament"), the New Testament, and about twelve additional books (I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Additions to Esther and Daniel, the Prayer of Manasseh, I and II Maccabees). The remaining books were designated "Apocrypha" (Greek for Hebrew S'forim Chitsonim "Books Outside the Canon").

In modern times the Protestant Church, following the Hebrew Canon, excluded the dozen books and designated them as Apocrypha, while those books which had been called Apocrypha by the Roman Catholic Church it called, rather arbitrarily, Pseudepigrapha ("False Writings"). Thus it is that while Apocryphal books may be

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read for spiritual edification, they lack entirely the authority of Holy Writ.³

VI. MANUSCRIPTS AND TRANSLATIONS OF THE SEPTUAGINT

A. Manuscripts of the Septuagint

It is not unlikely that even before the Septuagint translation came into being, some individual attempts were made by Alexandrian Jews at translating parts of the Torah into Greek. This was done in the same spirit that several English translations of parts of the Bible were made by Christians in England before the so-called King James version was done and by Jews in England and America before the version issued by the Jewish Publication Society of America in 1917. However, all traces of these assumed pre-Septuagint translations have disappeared, leaving only the Septuagint itself. The original Septuagint manuscript, too, has not been preserved. It may have perished during one of the anti-Jewish pogroms which occurred in Egypt under Roman domination, or when the great library in Alexandria burned down. Fortunately, copies of the Septuagint had been made. In our own times, pending a census of what was destroyed in Europe during World War II, there are in existence some twelve manuscripts containing the Septuagint of the entire Old Testament, and many hundreds containing individual divisions (the Pentateuch), or groups of books (the Minor Prophets; the Major Prophets), or individual books, or fragments of parts of single books. Most of the manuscripts are to be found in Italy, Great Britain and Ireland, France, Russia and Germany.

The best known manuscript of the Septuagint is Codex Vaticanus (Vatican Library), dating from about 350 C.E. It is an extremely fine quarto volume of the finest vellum, written in an

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extraordinarily beautiful hand, and containing now 759 leaves (of which 617 belong to the Old Testament) out of an original total of about 820 leaves. Another of the famous manuscripts of the Septuagint is Codex Sinaiticus. Some readers will remember that in 1933 the British Museum purchased this fourth century Codex from the Soviet Government for a reported price of some \$500,000. The same Museum is the owner of another fine and noted specimen of the Septuagint, the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus.

Since the end of World War I there have been discovered and published a group of Septuagint manuscripts known as the Chester Beatty Papyri, dating in part from the second century C.E. Numerous fragments of individual books have also been brought to light in recent years, some of them (the Rylands fragments of parts of some chapters in Deuteronomy) dating as early as about 150 B.C.E.⁴

B. Translations of the Septuagint

Early in the Common Era (probably second century) Latin-speaking Christians in Africa and Italy translated the Septuagint into Latin. This is known as the Old Latin version. At about the same time, other Christians in Egypt translated the Septuagint into Coptic (various dialects). After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (in the fourth century), different linguistic groups of Christians needed translations of the Christian Bible, the Septuagint, in their own tongues. Thus there came into being during the fourth and fifth centuries such versions as the Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, and Ethiopic. An Arabic translation followed about 700, and a Slavonic about 900.

The Septuagint exerted an influence upon many Bible translations even such as were not a direct translation of the Septuagint

itself. Thus the Syriac (Peshitta) translation made from the Hebrew Bible (probably during the second century C.E.), the Greek translations made by Theodotion, Aquila and Symmachus at about the same time (incorporated by Origen early in the third century in his six-columned Bible called "Hexapla"), and the Vulgate (Latin) translation by St. Jerome during the fourth and fifth centuries (to become the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church)--all of these were considerably influenced by the Septuagint.

VII. EDITIONS OF THE SEPTUAGINT

A. The Earlier Period (to about 1850)

Most manuscripts of the Septuagint are not readily accessible; moreover, in the course of copying the text of the Septuagint, various kinds of errors and alterations were introduced by scribes and scholars. Consequently, the text of no one manuscript of the Septuagint is completely identical with that of any other. Thus it became necessary to put out a handy edition of the Septuagint for scholars and students.

In 1517 printing was completed of a three-columned Bible in four volumes (publication of which was withheld until the New Testament volume was completed in 1520-1), known as the Complutensian Polyglott. Column I contained the Hebrew text, with the Targum at the foot of the page; Column II consisted of the Vulgate; and Column III constituted the Septuagint, with an interlinear Latin translation of it. It is the first printed text of the Septuagint. Among the other editions of the Septuagint, the best known are the Aldine (1518-19), Sixtine (1587), and Grave (1707-1720). From 1798 to 1827 there appeared in five large volumes the work of Robert Holmes (a Professor of Poetry at Oxford University)

and James Parsons, a text of the complete Septuagint and, what is more important, an apparatus of variant readings culled from 297 separate manuscripts of the Septuagint as well as from the Old Latin, Coptic, Arabic, Slavonic, Armenian and Georgian versions.

B. The Modern Period (from about 1850)

(1) A portable, relatively inexpensive edition of one manuscript of the Septuagint Codex Vaticanus, under the editorship of H. B. Swete, was issued in three normal-sized volumes by the Cambridge University Press in 1887-94 (revised in 1895-1899). This edition was very widely used in its time, and has come to be replaced only in very recent years by the more accurate and less expensive two-volume edition by A. Rahlfs (Stuttgart, 1935).

(2) In March, 1883, Cambridge University announced in its Reporter that it planned to issue an elaborate edition of the Septuagint and Apocrypha containing the variations of all the important Greek manuscripts, of the more important versions, and of the quotations made by Philo and Josephus and the earlier and more significant ecclesiastical writers. Nine volumes have appeared since 1906.

A generally similar kind of project was planned also by the University of Gottingen Septuagint Commission, spurred on (as was the Cambridge University) by the keen analytical work of the great orientalist, Paul de Lagarde. So far there have appeared Psalms, I Maccabees, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets -- the latter two exceptionally well done.

(3) A great work which deserves notice here is "The Book of Joshua" in Greek (Paris, 1931 ff.) by Max L. Margolis (1866-1932) of the Dropsie College in Philadelphia. Margolis obtained photo-

static copies, wherever possible, of all manuscripts of the Septuagint and of the translations of, or influenced by, the Septuagint. Then he compared these translations with the manuscripts of the Septuagint, and the manuscripts of the Septuagint with one another, and with the citations of the Septuagint in the writings of the early Church Fathers. He found that all this material could be distributed among four major groups (called recensions) and one mixed group which arose during the first few centuries C.E. in Egypt (especially Alexandria), Syria (especially Antioch), Palestine (the work of Origen, the noted Christian scholar), and Asia Minor (especially Constantinople). In his monumental work (all in autograph!), Prof. Margolis provided at the top of the page "the nearest approach to the Greek original as it left the hands of the hands of the translator (s)" of Joshua. Below the text there was made available the pertinent data of the chief recensions. And lastly, at the bottom of the page, brief notes bearing on the Septuagint in relation to the Hebrew text.

VIII. THE LANGUAGE OF THE SEPTUAGINT AND ITS INFLUENCE

A. The Language of the Septuagint

It used to be thought that the sort of Greek used in the Septuagint never really constituted a living dialect in Alexandria; that it was essentially an artificially contrived literary production consisting of Greek words (many of them created on the spot) put together after the manner and in the spirit of the Hebrew original.

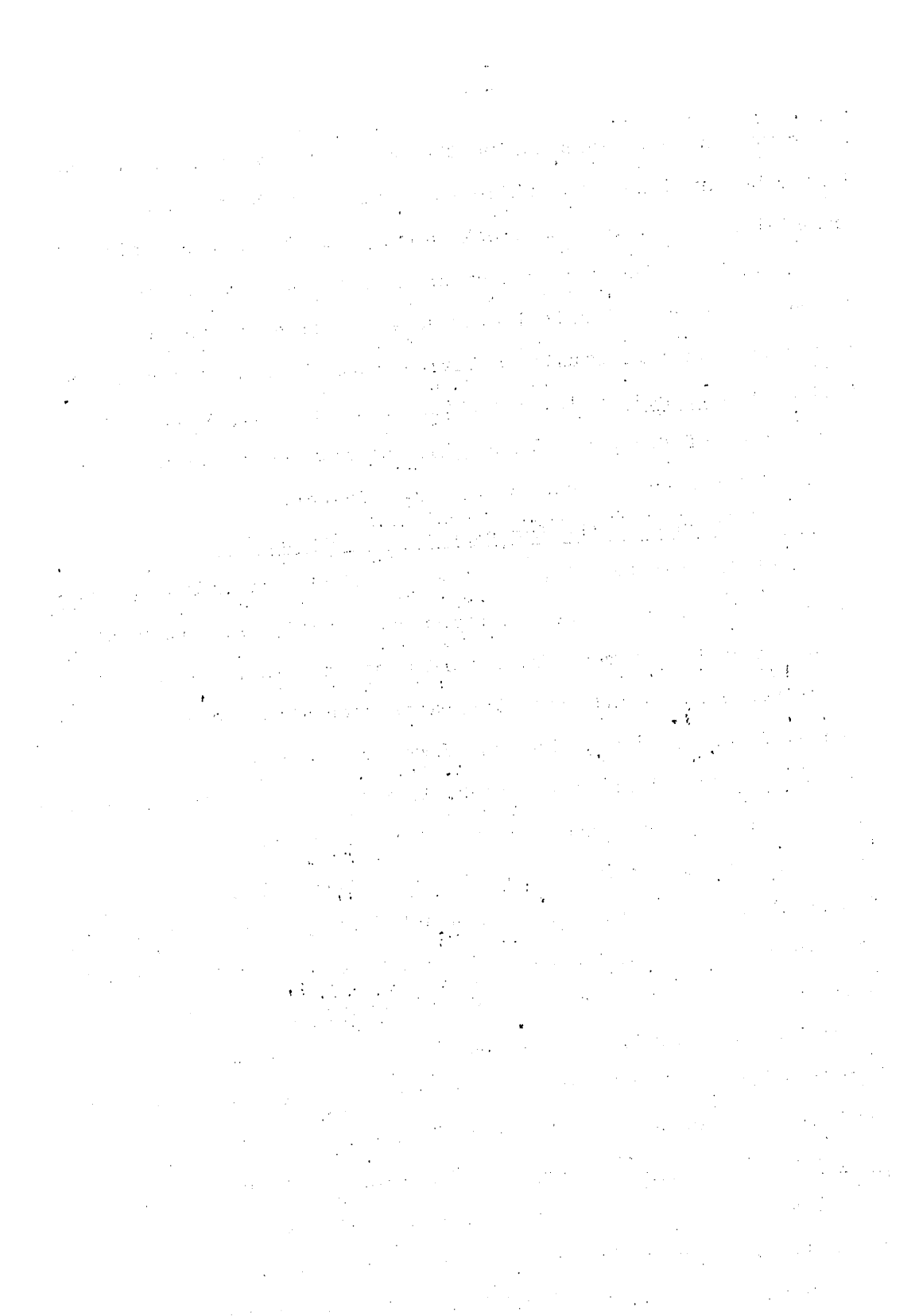
We know quite differently now. The Greek dialects spoken in and around Alexandria from about the third century B.C.E. onward have become known largely through the discovery of papyri and

other writing materials during the past fifty years. There can no longer be any doubt that while the Jews who made the Septuagint translation did adapt the Greek language to the Hebrew original (in essentially the same manner as English was adapted to the Hebrew in the now classical King James version of the Bible), they were nevertheless using a living dialect of Alexandrian Greek (called the Koine), a dialect which they knew very well indeed. As a matter of fact, the Septuagint has now become an important source for the reconstruction of that dialect.

B. The Influence of the Language of the Septuagint

What is more important is that the Jewish translator, sometimes lacking a Greek word to reproduce exactly the nuance of the Hebrew, gave the nearest Greek word a new meaning, one that came to influence Latin and other languages thereafter (e.g., English, French, German). Thus, when the Jews came to translate the Hebrew word borach "to bless" into Greek, they found themselves at a loss; such a concept, and hence the word for it, was unknown in Greek culture. So they took the nearest Greek word, eulogo, which meant "to speak well of, commend," and adapted it to the Jewish concept "to bless." In turn, when the Christians came to translate into Latin the Septuagint word for "bless" (eulogo), they too found themselves at a similar loss. So they took the nearest Latin word, benedico "to speak well of, commend," and adapted it to the now Jewish-Christian concept "to bless." The result was that Greek eulogo and Latin bendico acquired the meaning of Hebrew borach "to bless," and from them there developed the concept "to bless" in English, benir in French, and segnen in German.

In the same way, the English word "angel" developed the



special meaning of "messenger of God" (as did French ange and German engel) from Greek angelos (by way of the Latin angelus) only because the Greek word, which had only the simple meaning of "messenger," came to take on in the Septuagint the technical meaning of "messenger of God" to correspond to the Hebrew expression mal-ach Adonoi. (The reader may pursue this fascinating subject, e.g., the expressions "Lord," "Devil," and "paradise," in the fine chapter by A. Meillet, "Influence of the Hebrew Bible on European Languages," in The Legacy of Israel Oxford, 1927, pp. 473-81.)

IX. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SEPTUAGINT FOR THE STUDY OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

A. The Septuagint in Relation to the Masoretic Text

Far and away the greatest importance of the Septuagint lay in the proper use of it for the study of the Hebrew text of the Bible.

It so happens that the oldest manuscript of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible does not antedate the tenth century C.E. This text is the product of Masoretes, Jewish scholars who labored devotedly during the first millennium to transmit the Holy Scriptures in the form in which they received them. The Septuagint translation, on the other hand, is represented by one manuscript of the second century and several of the fourth and fifth centuries; and with the method employed by Margolis in the book of Joshua, it is possible to get back to approximately the original text of the Septuagint. From this text, in turn, it is generally possible to determine the character of the Hebrew text used by the translators.

It has long been recognized that the Hebrew text from which

the Septuagint translation was made differed in many respects from the Masoretic text.

Overwhelmingly the Hebrew text preserved by the Masoretes ^{with} agrees/that underlying the Septuagint, or is superior to it when the two do not agree. The use of the Septuagint comes into play when its Hebrew text differs from the Masoretic and there is uncertainty as to which of the two represents the original reading. This is where the competent textual critic of the Bible can show his mettle.

The average Biblical commentary of three or four decades ago was filled with a wealth of changes of the Hebrew text which were believed to be indicated and even demanded by the Septuagint. A great change began to take place after World War I, induced in part by archeology. The latter discipline has helped considerably in revolutionizing the attitude of the scholarly world toward the Bible. We are now far less inclined to be skeptical of something merely because extra-Biblical data supporting it are lacking. Until demonstrated otherwise, the benefit of the doubt must be given to the credit side of the Biblical ledger. The same attitude is now generally being taken toward the reliability of the text of the Masoretic Hebrew Bible in relation to the Septuagint and to the Hebrew text underlying it.

B. The Septuagint as a Jewish Work

An important reason for the older attitude of skepticism towards the Masoretic Bible was the failure on the part of scholars to bear in mind the fact that the Septuagint is a Jewish work, and this resulted in an enormous amount of time and effort being wasted in its unscientific use for the "elucidation" and "restoration" of

the Hebrew text.

(1) The Hebrew Bible was read, studied and interpreted by the Jews during the Maccabean, Mishnaic and Talmudic periods no less than it was before the second century B.C.E. and after the sixth century C.E. It is only reasonable to assume that where the Septuagint points or appears to point to a Hebrew reading which differs from that preserved in the Masoretic text, there may be involved not two variants of which only one can be original, but one reading of which the Septuagint is simply an interpretation. And parallels to this interpretation should be sought in the vast literature which the Jews produced from the second century B.C.E. through the sixth century C.E., a literature which is a mine of information for the discerning scholar. It is the great contribution of Rabbi Zecharias Frankel of Dresden (1801-75) to one phase of correct Septuagint study that he collected and classified material of this kind, demonstrating the manner in which the Septuagint exhibits the kind of exegesis found in the Targumim, Mishnah, Tosefta, Midrashim, and G'moro. Had this important approach been kept in mind, many of the best known critics of the past generations would never have emended the preserved Hebrew text so recklessly and indiscriminately.

(2) The Hebrew Bible was to the Jews a collection of sacred books. The Bible was translated into Greek precisely because the Sacred Scriptures had to be made accessible to those Jews who no longer knew enough Hebrew to read the original. The Aramaic Targums, Saadia's Arabic translation, and the modern English version sponsored by the Jewish Publication Society were made for the same reasons. Is it reasonable to suppose that these same Jews will-

fully or negligently altered and corrupted their Hebrew Bible between the third century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. to the extent that so many scholars assumed, to the extent, say, that the footnotes in the second and third editions of the most widely used critical edition today, R. Kittel's Biblia Hebraica, would indicate? Scholars should first have made an independent and thorough study not only of the Masoretic text of whatever book in the Bible they were commenting on, but also of the Septuagint. Had they done so, they would not have abused the Septuagint so frequently and unjustifiably as to create from it a Hebrew text which never existed outside of their own imagination.⁶

X. THE NEED TO RECLAIM ANCIENT JEWISH CULTURE

One of the most important periods in the vast range of Jewish history is the Second Jewish Commonwealth, which came to an end in 70 C.E. Much of the literary creativity of the Jews during this period, both in Judea and in the Diaspora (especially Alexandria) took on from the very beginning, or came to take on in time, Greek form. Among this extensive literature there were many scores of works of which the thirty or so which have been preserved acquired the designation "Apocrypha." There are the writings of the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, Philo (flourished during first half of the first century C.E.), and of the Jewish politician and historian of Judea and Rome, Flavius Josephus (about 37-100 C. E.), and there is the Septuagint.

After the loss of their sovereignty and the failure of the Bar-Kochba revolt, the Jews lost all interest in these "Greek" works, but thanks to the Catholic Church these works have been preserved. Jewry today is better off and in a different mood com-

pared with those catastrophic days. There is hardly a single important language in the world in which the Jews have not been culturally active during the past two millennia. One has merely to call to mind the great Jewish cultures in Aramaic, Latin, Arabic, Yiddish, German, French, Russian, English, and the like, to realize the truth of this statement. There is no longer any reason to withhold "recognition" from the significant culture produced by the Jews of Judea and the Diaspora around the turn of the Common Era.

There is, however, something more at stake here than merely reclaiming Jewish literature in Greek form. For some eighteen hundred years, ignored as it was by the Jews, this literature was utilized by Christian scholars chiefly to reconstruct the Christian aspect of the New Testament period. On the other hand, the vast range of the fundamentally important literature produced by the Jews in Hebrew and Aramaic in the post-Biblical period (especially the Midrashim and the Talmud) has scarcely been touched by Christian scholars. Such a procedure is tantamount to utilizing only the rabbinic sources for a study of the New Testament period in the Greco-Roman world! Yet the fact remains, and it is becoming increasingly recognized in recent years, that for the correct understanding of this literature, one must study it in the light of the Jewish history of the times, a history that can be reconstructed essentially only by the proper study of the Jewish post-Biblical sources. For the period between the third century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. this kind of study is absolutely indispensable for the correct understanding of Judaism, of certain aspects of Hellenism, and of early Christianity.

Let us hope that the Third Jewish Commonwealth, the modern State of Israel, with the active aid of Jewish scholarship and patronage in other parts of the world, will help to restore a significant phase of the culture of the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

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QUESTIONS

1. What were the circumstances in the Jewish community in Egypt about 2200 years ago that brought the Septuagint into being?
2. How do these circumstances compare with those in the United States during the nineteenth century?



3. What languages were used by the Jews of Egypt during the last few centuries B.C.E.?
4. What is the importance of the Letter of Aristeas?
5. Why did the Jews reject the Septuagint later on? Why did the Christian Church adopt it and preserve it?
6. In what external features does the Septuagint differ from the Masoretic text?
7. What have been some of the more notable influences of the Septuagint?
8. In what ways is the Septuagint important for the study of the Bible?
9. Should the Septuagint be reclaimed as a Jewish work? Why?

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